

Total number of cannabis and ketamine abusers increased in 2020

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) noted the local drug situation in 2020 at its quarterly meeting today (March 29). While the total number of reported drug abusers decreased compared to that in 2019, there were increases in the figures for cannabis and ketamine (commonly known as "K") abusers. Cannabis was also the most common type of drug abused among young people and newly reported drug abusers.

Although the latest figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in 2020 decreased as compared with that in 2019, the figures might have been affected by the COVID-19 situation. Reporting agencies might have come into contact with fewer drug abusers due to the pandemic, and might have taken more time to submit data of drug abusers to the CRDA. The Narcotics Division (ND) and ACAN will pay close attention to the number of reported drug abusers for 2021 and the impact of the pandemic on the figures.

According to the latest figures from the CRDA, the total number of reported drug abusers in 2020 dropped by 4 per cent (from 5 772 to 5 569) when compared with that in 2019. On the other hand, the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased by 6 per cent (from 494 to 525). Among them, students accounted for 35 per cent, higher than the proportion in 2019 at 26 per cent.

The number of reported cannabis abusers continued to increase in 2020, 29 per cent higher than that in 2019 (from 522 to 673). In addition, the number of reported ketamine abusers also went up by 18 per cent (from 423 to 499). The number of reported young abusers of cannabis aged under 21 rose by 17 per cent from 2019 (from 235 to 275), and cannabis was the most common drug abused among young people. The number of young ketamine abusers increased substantially by 69 per cent (from 48 to 81).

The number of newly reported drug abusers in 2020 was 12 per cent lower than that in 2019 (from 1 617 to 1 423). Among them, cannabis was the most common type of drug abused with 444 abusers, 28 per cent higher than 348 in 2019. Moreover, the median history of drug abuse of newly reported abusers (i.e. the time for abusers to be reported to the CRDA by reporting agencies from their first drug abuse) was five years, compared with 5.7 years in 2019, showing that the problem of hidden drug abuse persisted.

The total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (at 3 409) remained higher than that of reported narcotic analgesic abusers (at 2 842). Heroin continued to be the most common type of single drug abused among all reported drug abusers, but the number of reported drug abusers dropped by 2 per cent (from 2 895 to 2 837) compared to that in 2019. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") was the most common type of psychotropic substance

abused, with the number of reported abusers having fallen by 9 per cent (from 1 343 to 1 223).

The CRDA figures for 2020 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Donald Li, expressed concern over the increasing number of cannabis abusers. He said, "Cannabis and cannabinoids like tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) are controlled dangerous drugs. Taking cannabis can cause hallucination, IQ loss, anxiety, depression and more. Abusers may also suffer from amotivational syndrome, losing the drive to do things in which they used to be interested."

He added that products claiming to be composed of pure cannabidiol (CBD) are available for sale in the market. Although CBD itself is not controlled under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (DDO), members of the public should note that CBD products containing any level of THC are regarded as dangerous drugs and controlled under the DDO.

The ND and the Department of Health have jointly issued a note setting out information on CBD products. It is available at www.nd.gov.hk/pdf/CBD_Information_Note_English.pdf.

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "The number of ketamine abusers increased substantially by about 70 per cent last year, and such an increase warrants attention. Ketamine abuse can damage a person's mental health. Prolonged ketamine abuse can result in bladder contraction and even bladder fibrosis. In addition, a study by the University of Hong Kong has shown that some ketamine abusers have suffered from damaged bile duct and, where serious, liver failure."

Members of the public facing drug problems, or coming to know that their family members or friends are having drug problems, can seek help through the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186.